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Salience and Representation of Islam and Uyghur Muslims in the Chinese Communist Party Press

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An Aljazeera article, published on January 9, 2015, ran the following headline: "Muslims in the news only when they're behind the gun" (Beydoun 2015). This statement is echoed in results of media research indicating that Islam and Islamic actors are often constructed in the Western press as a foreign threat or the domestic Other. Already before 9/11, news articles in the US media were found to link Islam to fundamentalism and terrorism (Awass 1996). In his seminal work on Islam media coverage, Edward Said (1997) pointed out the Western media's almost automatic association of Islam with fundamentalism.

This chapter interrogates whether the flagship publication of the Chinese Communist Party, *Renminribao,* also portrays Islamist actors as the "threatening Other." Just like antagonistic representations, essentialism, and stereotyping have been shown to be communicative mechanisms in Western imagery of the Oriental "Other" (Said 1978), similar strategies appear to underlie Chinese representations of the Other, be it the foreign Other when tensions arise with foreign nations or domestic Other when viewed as secessionist or unpatriotic (Lams 2014). Relating to Islam, it appears both from the literature and from our data that the Other in the Chinese press consists not really of peaceful Islamist actors, but rather of terrorist and fundamentalist groups, primarily from abroad and to a lesser extent also internal terrorist actors. The Chinese term "three forces" or "sangu shili" (三股势力, often translated into English as "three evils")—separatism, religious extremism, and terrorism—was introduced in 2000

during meetings of the Shanghai Five, now the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. It especially refers to external forces that may negatively influence the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR). Of specific relevance is the perceived domestic threat of the Uyghur Muslims, less because of the religious dimension than because of the ethno-political factor. Given the research question whether there is a similar type of Othering in the Chinese press to the one spotted in some other media systems, this chapter focuses on the depiction of the Uyghur Muslim actor in China, rather than on other groups of Chinese Muslims in China, such as the Hui Muslims. Previous research suggests that negativity in mainstream Chinese press narratives is less salient when it concerns these other Muslim actors (Alkazemi 2015).

The public discursive link between Islam and its radical followers has fluctuated over the years. In the aftermath of the 2001 Twin Tower attacks, the media in the Middle East, United States, South Asia, and South-East Asia reflected the essentialist rhetoric of "leaders with worldviews blinkered by religion, nationalism and ignorance" (Pintak 2006, 189) and were transformed from channels of understanding to tools of violence. Gradually, however, the heated rhetoric of the post-9/11 climate subsided and it became commonplace to distinguish the faith of Islam from its radicalized followers. Formulations, such as "clash of civilizations" (Mathews 1926, Huntington 1993) or "roots of Muslim rage" (Lewis 1990) as causal explanations for violence were questioned. Yet, since the emergence of Islamic State, Islamophobia has resurged. The semantic distinction between the faith and its followers who commit violence in its name became lost in what has been termed "securitization of Islam" (see chapter 1) or the political construction of threat of Islamic radicalism (Piscatori 2015). Therefore, a book project like this, probing into the press representation of internal/external Islam and Islamic actors across various media systems cannot be timelier.

In view of the renewed Islamophobia, a textual analysis of how Islam and its main actors are portrayed in press narratives is relevant to point out the danger of discursive mechanisms, such as dichotomizing between the evil Other and the benevolent Self. Instances of generalization are shown by Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005) when they observe that recurring language, used to describe Islam and Muslims, such as "Islamic terrorism" or "Muslim fanatics," can come to be representative of all Muslims and Islam as a religion (2005, 4). Other media discursive practices are framing certain groups and events from a particular perspective and consistently attributing positive/negative properties in descriptions of in- and out-groups. According to the results of a 2012 study[1] that explored how journalists approach the issues of ethnicity and religion in diverse societies within the EU, the majority of stories on religious aspects were reports on contested matters such as the veil, teaching Islam in schools, integration,

places of worship, abortion, Islamophobia, religious extremism, homosexuality, and sexual scandals in the Catholic Church (IFJ 2012, 58).

An outline of research on Western media language and Islam can be found in Baker, Gabrielatos, and McEnery (2013b), listing studies on US, British, and Australian news media. As the authors contend, "research that has examined the representation of Islam in the western news media has generally found evidence for negative bias" (2013b, 257). However, Bleich et al. (2015) bring a nuance to the scholarly arguments by demonstrating the relativity of certain results, in that, for example, headlines in British right-leaning newspapers are more negative than those in left-leaning papers. This nuance is echoed by Faimau (2013), who examined the discursive representation of Islam and Muslims in the British Christian news media. With a few exceptions, the Christian media reportedly separate the extremists from the rest of Muslims. Terrorists are considered the hijackers of the Islamic religion, not its representatives. This conclusion is consistent with our findings in the current study of the Chinese press representation of Islam and its actors.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

Much as the present analysis was conducted separately from the team exploring Western representation of Islam,[2] the research process is comparable to that described in the chapters in the second part of the book. Similar elements were analyzed, such as salience, news location and occasions, (sub)themes and their religious dimensions, representation of actors in terms of their religious background, gender, and collectivity. An extra variable, ethnicity, was added because Muslim actors belong to various ethnicities and the degree of their integration within the majority Han Chinese society appears to distinguish the Uyghur Muslims from other Islamist groups in China, such as the Hui. This chapter focuses on portrayal of the Muslim actor rather than on Islam as such. The religious dimension in the Chinese official press stories is limited, given the sensitivity of religion in China. As a result of the traditional Confucian orthodoxy, the Chinese state has, since ancient times, reserved the right to exercise strict control over all forms of religion. The Marxist orthodoxy, adhering to the principle that religion is opium for the people, enhanced this prerogative to control religious groups. In view of this general state attitude to religion, it is not surprising that few articles can be found on religion, and even fewer on external or internal Islam. A second difference from the team work concerns the hypotheses on (ideological) political parallelism among the European press representations of Islam. These are not applicable to the Chinese corpus, because the conservative right/progressive left divide does not hold in the Chinese press.

Yet another divergence from the content analysis of the team project is the qualitative approach to the analysis. Besides mapping salience, which informs us on the first-level media agenda setting,[3] this study examines what type of semantic roles are attributed to which actors. Critical discourse analysis was used to trace discursive strategies of positive self- and negative other-representation (Van Dijk 2009) and, additionally, to reconstruct any underlying frames or central organizing themes. Framing is a theoretically interesting approach to the study of cognitive processes and their effects on media consumers. The theoretical perspectives on framing can be synthesized under Entman's formulation of the four functions of framing, "to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman 1993, 52). Rather than investigating the classical generic frames, as put forward by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), specific frames were derived from the texts in an inductive way. Frames emerge from textual devices that attribute certain properties to actors and present arguments like justifications, causes, and consequences of a certain event in a systematic way. Since these framing and reasoning devices (Gamson and Lasch 1983) cumulatively lead to a frame package or an overarching perspective of an event or of actors, it was decided that at least three framing devices had to be identified within a single text for an emerging image about a particular actor or situation to be recognized as a frame. Examples of such devices can be visual images, word choice, metaphors, or evaluative attributions of negative or positive traits for certain actors.

The unit of investigation was the Chinese-language newspaper 人民日报 (*Renminribao*, henceforth RMRB). All articles from 2008 and 2009 that contained the term "Uyghur" at least three times were retrieved from the official RMRB archive website through the search string 维吾尔族 *weiwuerzu*.[4] The search yielded a corpus of 60 articles, six for 2008 and 54 for 2009 with an average length of 2,534 characters. In 2008, the Beijing Olympics garnered international media exposure and on July 5, 2009, ethnic riots erupted in Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang and home to the majority of the Uyghur population.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND TO THE NARRATIVES: ISLAM AND MUSLIM GROUPS IN CHINA

Muslim Groups in China

While few works have been published on Chinese media representation of Islam and local and international Muslim actors, a plethora of works

can be found on Islamic groups in China.[5] Many of these works discuss the contentious relationship between the various groups of Chinese Muslims and the state, their association with the larger Islamic community, and issues of ethnicity, culture, and religious identity. In this chapter, we limit ourselves to only the most relevant aspects to contextualize the narratives under investigation and refer to the literature for a more in-depth discussion of the relationship between Islamic minority groups in China and the dominant Han society.

No definitive figures can be given on the number of Muslims in China, as the official Chinese Census identifies people according to their ethnic nationality, but not religious affiliation. Official Chinese doctrine is highly uncomfortable with religion. Yet, Islam is one of China's five officially recognized religions. Just like the polyphony found in Flanders' female Muslim identities (Broos and Van den Bulck 2012), Islam is not a monolithic bloc in China. The number of Muslims in China was estimated at 22.8 million in 2008, comprising ten Muslim minority nationalities. Although they constitute only 2% of the population, their numbers are impressive when compared with other Muslim states. There are more Muslims in China than in Malaysia, and more than in every Middle Eastern Muslim nation except Iran, Turkey, and Egypt (Gladney 2003). The largest group is the Hui, third in rank of the minority nationalities after the Zhuang and the Manchu. Their 10.9 million people are dispersed across the country and speak the regional language in addition to Han Chinese, Arabic, and Persian. The second-largest Muslim community are the Turkic-speaking Uyghurs with an estimated 9.5 million people. As the fifth-largest minority group, they reside in China's western Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The Kazak are ranked the third-largest Muslim group with a population of 1.4 million people (Poston, Alnuaimi, and Zhang 2010).

Where religion is the prime unitary factor for the Hui people, despite the regime's efforts at dissociating religion from their identity,[6] it is not the only determining factor in the identity construction of the Uyghur people in the Northwestern Province of Xinjiang, referred to by many Muslims as "East Turkistan" (the former name of Xinjiang, currently a taboo word for the Chinese government). Ethnic conflict in that area was frequent already during the Republican era but worsened in the face of the Communist leadership's efforts at harmonization of the minorities to achieve a unified Chinese nation. Chinese Muslims have been subjected to "Hanification" or "Sinification" (Siddiqui and Imtiyaz 2014). This is a sociopolitical strategy by the majority Han authorities aiming at the assimilation of the ethnic and religious minorities by linguistic integration, mixed marriages, education in public schools using Mandarin as the main language. In 1945 Uyghurs constituted 80% of Xinjiang's population. Today, incentives for Han Chinese to move to the province have reduced

the ethnic group to only 43% of Xinjiang population (MacGillivray and Harder 2009). Bovingdon (2010) illustrates how the PRC has failed in transforming Uyghurs into loyal members of the multiethnic Chinese nation and how Chinese policy has sown profound discontent among the Uyghur population.

The difference between the Hui and Uyghurs in their relationships with the Chinese state is neatly detailed in the following excerpt:

> While both the Hui and Uyghurs have been equally subjected to social biases, ethnic and religious discrimination and government repression, the Uyghurs have an, arguably, tenser relation with the Chinese government than the Hui. . . . The difference in treatment between Hui and Uyghurs can be attributed to a number of factors, the most important being contestation over Xinjiang region and a sense of Uyghur independence and autonomy relative to the People's Republic of China. (Shorey 2013)

In between the two groups of the Hui and the Uyghurs, there is a range of Muslim nationalities who are either closer to the Uyghurs in resisting Chinese culture (Uzbeks, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks) or closer to the Hui in accommodating it (Dongxiang and Bonan) (Gladney 2003).

State–Uyghur Relations

In general, the Uyghurs are more resistant to integration into Chinese society than other Muslim groups. They are the only Muslim minority group in China that expresses a desire for a separate state, although it remains unclear whether or not this sentiment is shared by all Uyghurs (Gladney 2003).[7] In addition, Uyghurs sense that their region's resources are being expropriated because the mining and export of Xinjiang's oil and gas are carried out by an almost entirely Han workforce and according to Beijing's rules (Bovingdon 2004). Heavy Han immigration and the allocation of powerful government and party positions to Han officials, as well as the pressure on Uyghurs to assimilate linguistically and culturally have deepened the cultural divide despite the explicit constitutional protections and the laws on autonomy.

Uyghurs are also often portrayed as united around separatist or Islamist causes, although they are divided between Sufi and non-Sufi, over territorial loyalties, linguistic differences, commoner-elite alienation, urban vs. rural residence, regional loyalties, and attitudes about the public role of Islam (Gladney 2003, Bovingdon 2004, Light 2007). The Chinese government takes issue with the Uyghurs over their insistence on a distinct cultural, but especially political identity, which runs counter to the ideal of a unified Chinese nation.

More importantly, the regime links all Uyghur secessionist activities and violence with the most jihadist Uyghur group, the Turkistani Islamic Party (TIP), which claims to be the successor to the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and, since 2008, has used the global jihadist media to present itself as the successor of the classical Islamic caliphate, operating parallel to Al-Qaeda. While having ties to the Taliban, it is found to have only peripheral links to Al-Qaeda and, unlike other militant Islamist groups, it has failed to break into the mainstream Arabic information environment. A 2004 study of Xinjiang violence concluded there had not been any verifiable activity by ETIM prior to its being labelled as terrorist by the US in 2002 (Millward 2004).

Roberts (2015) contends that the Chinese state has labeled virtually all forms of dissent among Uyghurs as "terrorism" and wonders whether the anti-terrorism policies of the PRC since 2001 have actually made Uyghur terrorism a self-fulfilling prophecy. Whereas prior to the terrorist events on 11 September 2001, activism in Xinjiang had been occasionally associated with terrorism, after the Twin Tower attacks it was invariably identified as such (Shichor 2009, 46).

Chinese religious repression of both Muslims and Christians[8] hardly gets the type of Western media attention as does similar repression of Buddhism in Tibet. Yet, human rights groups have documented several cases of beatings, detentions, and executions of Uyghurs charged with separatist activities. A 2008 US State Department report criticized China's use of regulations restricting Muslims' religious activity, teaching, and places of worship. In September 2015, the Party consolidated its control over all religions, issuing for the first time public rules for the United Front Work Department, which manages relations with different faiths and other sectors of society (UCA News 2015). Party members are now prohibited from following a faith because of stipulations that religion must be separated from the Chinese state. Authorities have outlawed cultural and religious markers including burqas and large beards. Beijing maintains it is only targeting a minority of Muslim separatists, labelling them "terrorists." Despite the regime's different approach to the various Muslim ethnic groups, the geographically widening designation of Islam as a security issue or as "political Islam" strengthens the Chinese government's hand.

Yet, in view of China's position as the largest exporter to the Middle East, Chinese state policy that is openly repressive on Muslim issues runs the risk of being economically and politically counterproductive (Piscatori 2015). The success of China's plan for a New Silk Road and its wish to foster good relations with Muslim states depends to a large extent on its handling of domestic Muslim issues (Dillon 1994, Gladney 2003, Zheng 2011). Therefore, China is careful to maintain the semantic separation

between the faith ("Islam") and those who engage in terrorist acts. As a study of the editorials and commentaries in some official Chinese newspaper stories about the Charlie Hebdo attacks reveals, terrorism is viewed as different from Islam, which as a religion is reported to have peace as its core value (Lupano 2015). The Chinese leadership also recognizes the benefits to be gained from not openly cracking down too severely on religious practices, not only to gain goodwill from Islamic countries in the Middle East for the sake of international trade and diplomacy, but also to safeguard the national dependence on the valuable natural resources of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. Moreover, when religious activity is condoned it allows the government to monitor these religious groups in the interest of preserving national security and national unity (Shorey 2013).

Research of Chinese Official Press Representation of Muslims in China

A mixed picture emerges from the literature on press representation of Muslims in China. One quantitative study of a selection of 40 (unspecified) Chinese newspapers over a period from July 5, 2009, to October 12, 2012, concludes that Chinese Muslims receive more positive coverage in view of the articles' focus on cultural festivals, dietary restrictions, modest dress, and annual pilgrimage to Mecca (Alkazemi 2015). However, the search terms in Alkazemi's study included "Hui minority," which may have yielded a corpus with a focus on the Hui Muslims. As was clarified above, this group has a less contentious relationship with the Han authorities than the Uyghur Muslims. On Chinese state media websites, the Communist Party engages in a discursive online competition with the Uyghur diaspora narratives on Uyghur people and their homeland Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (Culpepper 2012).[9] The English-language website "True Xinjiang," maintained by editors and correspondents from the *Global Times*, an international affairs publication produced by the CCP official newspaper People's *Renminribao*, shows the newspaper's feeling about the "untruths" given by the Uyghur diaspora. According to Culpepper, Uyghur diaspora representations of religion focus on Chinese government policies of religious repression and refrain from suggesting an inextricably linked Muslim-Uyghur identity. The Uyghur American Association has asked media outlets to avoid labeling Uyghurs as "Chinese Muslims," given their Central Asian-Turkic heritage and the presence of Uyghur Christians (2012, 194).[10] As Culpepper notes, the Uyghur diaspora online community is particularly upset by restrictions on the building of mosques and private religious schools and are equally offended by the bans on government officials, state employees, and Communist Party

members from entering mosques, which prevent practicing Muslims from participating in the Chinese party-state apparatus. In representations of Uyghur culture, the Chinese government pays scant attention to the Uyghur's Central Asian-Turkic features. Instead, it focuses on those cultural characteristics which lend themselves to tourism, such as Uyghur foods and traditional Muslim festivals (Culpepper 2012, 194). This supports Dru Gladney's research on the government's policy of representing the "colorful" minorities in China as commodities (Gladney 1994b).

It has also been argued that the prime state newspapers (*Renminribao*, *China Daily*) in addition to local papers, such as *Xinjiang Daily, Xinjiang Metropolis Daily*, disregard complexity in their front-page representation of the Minkaohan, an Uyghur subgroup in the period 2002–2010 (Zheng 2011). An important change in Uyghur representation after 9/11 was identified, corresponding with an increase in negative depictions linking the group to terrorism and as a greater threat to China (2011, iii). Zheng also noted the supposed insignificance of Uyghurs on the state media agenda, given the low number of articles on the front pages. In times of crisis (July–September 2008), the English-language paper, targeting international readers, published more articles than its Chinese-language sister paper. The local Xinjiang papers, catering to Uyghurs, had scarce coverage of the group, except in 2009, when the July riots swept the region. Leader-in-exile Rebiya Kadeer and the World Uyghur Congress were depicted as the culprits. The state media highlighted the ethnic riots, promoted ethnic unity and social stability, and proposed a fight against terrorism as a remedy.

Interestingly, the English-language *China Daily*, catering to an international audience, was found to devote 49% of its articles to the issue of terrorism when covering Uyghurs, while the Chinese-language RMRB had none. Since 9/11 and after the US State Department put ETIM on its list of terrorist groups, Uyghurs have been cast in the light of terrorism quite consistently in the *China Daily* (Zheng 2011). Because of some Uyghur engagement in terrorist activities and involvement in Al-Qaeda, China has jumped on the bandwagon of the US "war on terrorism." The terrorism and economic development frames were found to permeate Uyghur coverage in ordinary years, while crime, ethnic unity, and social stability frames dominate in times of crisis. As Zheng argues, the fighting terrorism frame may be used as "an excuse to justify its [the government's] crackdown on Uyghurs in Xinjiang, while hyping economic development to buttress its assumption that Xinjiang is still economically backward and in need of help from Beijing" (Zheng 2011, 116). Frames such as religion, cultural activities, and poverty were not identified. Instead, Uyghurs are said to be increasingly represented as a threat to China's stability, security, and national integrity.

Besides the Chinese traditional state media, mainstream network media coverage of religious and ethnic news have also been analyzed. Bai and Zhen (2014) checked network media, such as *People* and *Xinhua Net*, from 2009 to 2013. Results indicate that religious reports concentrate more on the political category, the main type of which is the organization of religious meetings (66% of 40 articles in *People,* and 53% of 94 articles in *Xinhua Net*) (2014, 28). As the religious culture is covered through a political lens, the coverage is limited. Similarly, the minority news articles are politically coated: political news, including meetings, political learning, leadership attending activities, is the dominant category (55.5% of 60 articles for *People* and 48.6% of 183 articles for *Xinhua Net*), relegating cultural news (including introduction of religious history and cultural traditions) and educational news to second and third place. This tallies with the thematic hierarchies indicated by Zheng (2011). As issues of minorities and religion are part of the minefield of political ideology, Bai and Zhen (2014) found the religious discourse to be clad in vague language. Expressions focusing on national unity, social stability, harmony, and common prosperity of all ethnic groups are viewed as symptomatic of a political propaganda mode.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: PORTRAYAL OF UYGHUR MUSLIMS IN THE RENMINRIBAO NARRATIVES OF 2008 AND 2009

The following paragraphs detail the results of the content analysis with quantitative data in terms of frequency counts. This survey is followed by a description of the frames retrieved from the narratives.

Content Analysis

The first section sheds light on the journalistic attention to Islam in the articles about the Uyghur, on genre, news locations, and news occasions. This is followed by a survey of themes and subthemes, religious dimensions, types of actors and their ethnic and religious backgrounds, as well as on the origin of the articles.

Salience, Genres, News Locations, and News Occasions

As concerns prominence of the terms "Islam" (回教—Huíjiào—or 伊斯兰教—Yīsīlánjiào) or "Uyghurs" in the headlines or subtitles, only 12 of 60 articles (20%) make an explicit reference to one of these two notions in the (sub) title. The vast majority of these (sub) headlines refer to the Uy-

ghurs (10 articles), while only two mention Islam. One reason is the methodological selection of the keyword search string 维吾尔族 *weiwuerzu (Uyghurs)*, which did not include the terms for Islam, as the focus of the research was on the portrayal of the Uyghur Muslim actor. Yet, this finding indicates that the religious dimension does not prevail in headlines referring to the Uyghur population.

The corpus of 60 articles consists of commentaries about current affairs (50%), hero stories commending people for their good performance (13.3%), news reports (13.3%), human interest stories (13.3%), editorials (8.3%), interviews (6.7%), feature stories (6.7%), letters to the editor (1.7%), and statistics reports (1.7%). The large number of commentaries or *shiping* 时评 is not peculiar, as this genre typifies the Chinese press (Zhao 2012). Also typical for the communist press is the genre in which narratives of heroic deeds are told in the style of Lei Feng, the selfless PLA soldier, who in a 1963 nationwide campaign became the epitome of the modest soldier devoted to the communist cause. This type of propaganda takes precedence over the pure news reports, which are remarkably few in number, especially at a time of great unrest in Xinjiang after the ethnic riots on July 5, 2009.

As for news locations, 97 areas are covered, 74 of which are located in China. Not unexpectedly, the Uyghur capital, Urumqi, is the most prominent place, being covered 30 times (40.5% of the domestic coverage), followed by the region Xinjiang (17 times or 17.3%). The discrepancy in attention between the urban area and the rural periphery echoes the findings by Zheng (2011). Among the 23 foreign news locations, categorized in six foreign nations (US, Pakistan, Canada, Germany, Spain, and South Korea), the US ranks first with eight references (34.8% of the foreign news locations) because it hosts a large number of overseas Chinese, not to mention the exiled Uyghur leader, Rebiya Kadeer. Pakistan, which as a neighbor and close ally of China is an important trade hub, ranks second with four mentions (17.4% of the foreign news locations).

The news locations are, as can be expected, related to the news being reported. In total, 18 events were identified, 16 of which occurred only once. Thirty-one articles (51.7%) are related to the July 5 ethnic riots between Uyghurs and Han Chinese in Urumqi, which resulted in hundreds of casualties. Twelve articles (20%) do not discuss a news event. They merely discuss matters of human interest or consist of hero stories. All news occasions were classified as negative, positive, or neutral. Thirty-two articles report on negative events, as could be expected, given that 31 articles are related to the riots. Ten reports deal with positive occasions and 18 articles were categorized as neutral, which can partly be explained by the fact that 12 articles have no direct news occasion.[11]

(Sub) themes, Religious Dimensions, Ethnic/Religious Background of News Actors and Authors

Themes and religious dimensions While mapping the newsworthiness of events, the following categories were registered: (domestic) politics, crime, human interest, social welfare and education, culture, foreign news, agriculture. Nowhere does the theme of Uyghur nationalism emerge. Politics is the prevalent theme (31.7%). Other recurrent themes are criminality (23.3%), human interest topics (16.7%), and social welfare or education (15%). Subthemes linked with economy, like poverty and development, are frequently reported, but mostly used in a socio-cultural sense.

Only 19 texts (31.7%) contain religious dimensions. The following 14 dimensions cumulatively generated 48 markings: Islam (2x), peaceful attitude of Islam (2x), Koran (4x), halal food (3x), Islamic slogans (2x), Islamic holidays (3x), Islamic republic (1x), Islamic clergy (5x), Islamic institutions (8x), mosque (6x), Muslims (2x), religious extremism (4x), religious freedom (3x), and religious policies (3x). Most of these terms relate explicitly or implicitly to Islam. The latter three noun phrases (religious extremism, religious freedom, and religious policies) are used in the context of Islam and are politically coated. If we view the "Islamic institutions" and "the Islamic republic" as political categories, nearly half of the 48 references to religion carry a political ring, which would support Bai and Zhen's (2014) argument about the primary focus on the political aspect of religion. Most articles only include one reference to religion, but one text registers nine. In a couple of reports, imams relate eyewitness stories of the events on July 5 at the White mosque of Urumqi. Islam is said to disapprove of the use of violence[12] and to be a peaceful religion. None of the mosque's employees were reportedly involved in the violence.[13] Spokespeople of predominantly Muslim countries, such as Syria, Turkey, Indonesia, Morocco are said to approve of the Chinese government's handling of the "incidents" and claim that China guarantees religious freedoms but also urge China to clamp down on religious extremism.[14] Hence, legitimation of state action is achieved by seeking support from external Muslim leaders.

As most of the texts mentioning Uyghurs do not include a religious dimension, the primary focus in the corpus is not on religion, but on ethnic riots. Therefore, it is not surprising that the narratives widely report on vandalism, organized crime, separatism, terrorism, and religious extremism. Most importantly, no causal links are made between Uyghurs and terrorism. In addition, it is explicitly stated that religion is not the problem. The culprits are separatists who destroy the unity of the Minzu (nationalities) and who are influenced by evil forces from abroad, such

as the World Uyghur Congress and its leader, Rebiya Kadeer. It is often repeated that the majority of the Uyghurs are not separatists. Not unlike the Chinese discursive strategy of reducing the separatist threat from Taiwan to a small proportion of the Taiwanese people (Lams 2014), are the Uyghur separatists reduced to a minority.

As concerns subthemes which occur four times or more across the corpus, religion only features as religious extremism, and appears in a mere 6.7% of the articles. More important subthemes are development (50%), separatism (48.3%), terrorism (40%), ethnic violence (20%), and unity of Minzu (20%). Poverty is a subtheme in only 16.7% of the corpus, followed by education (11.7%). The themes of citizens helping each other and the role of the People's Liberation Army in extending help and bringing stability both register 6.7% of the articles. This thematic line-up corresponds with the findings by Zheng (2011) about the *RMRB* front-page articles themes. The focus on government aid to the development of minority areas and the unity between the Minzu is clad in a heavy propaganda discourse mode, positioning the Self in a positive mode. The minority cultures are depicted as suffering from slow economic growth and being most eager to accept help from a benevolent government.

Types of news actors For the analysis of actors, the team project's variables of gender and collectivity were retained and ethnic background was added. Results are as follows: out of 699 actors, 475 are individuals (68%). Among the coded collectives (224 or 32%), which cannot be divided by gender, we note organizations, countries, government bodies, ethnic, and other groups. Of the individuals, male actors are dominant with 79.7% versus 20.3% of female actors. For 448 actors (64.1%), ethnic background is not mentioned. This is the case for the collectives, like Xinjiang, the army, people of all nationalities (40.2%) and the individuals who remain unspecified (59.8%). Of the 251 ethnically specified actors, the Uyghurs and the Han feature most prominently with 55.7% and 18.7% respectively. The "other" category, consisting of all non-Han (both Chinese and foreigners) accounts for 25.6% of the specified actors.[15]

The religious background of almost none of these actors is explicitly mentioned. Only three out of 699 actors are identified as imams. Yet, specified actors belonging to an ethnic group considered Muslim by the Chinese government were coded as Muslim actors. A similar rationale held for those actors with the nationality of a country that has a mainly Islamic population as well as for the predominantly Muslim countries that are actors in this corpus. This resulted in a coding of 180 actors (25.8% of all news actors or 71.7% of all specified actors) as Muslim actors. However, given the large category of "ethnically unspecified" actors (64.1%), it is difficult to give an accurate picture for the actors' religious background.

What is meaningful, however, is the little explicit attention given to the religious component of the actors' identity.

As for the background of the articles' authors, one third of the source is not specified, as very often there is either no attribution or a vague reference to, for example, a "journalist of the Xinhua news agency" (the official Chinese news agency). In 40 articles, a source is given but ethnic background is not mentioned.[16] It is difficult to derive ethnicity from names. Although one can easily distinguish Uyghur names from Han Chinese names, it is not easy to distinguish Han Chinese names from Manchu or Hui names or to distinguish Uyghur names from Kazakh names. We can only conclude that none of the names mentioned in the corpus was Turkic, which points at an underrepresentation of the Uyghur's voice in the text production process.

Framing Analysis

As for Islam, only two instances of the frame "Islam as a peaceful religion"[17] and one occurrence of the frame "China respecting religious freedom" were found. The former frame presents a positive perspective about Islam and the latter renders a sanitized picture about the state of religious freedom in China. Of the eight frames about Uyghurs, implicitly generated through references to people of minorities or people of Xinjiang in general (including Uyghurs), three have a negative ring ("lack of gratitude to state," "need for propaganda work with Xinjiang minorities," "use of minority culture as pretext for separatism") and five carry a more positive message ("minority people are outstanding personnel"; "majority of Uyghurs are anti-separatist"; "Xinjiang citizens are models"; "Xinjiang people are successful"; and "united nationalities build a harmonious society." These mixed images result in a nuanced picture of Uyghurs.

The same result emerges from an examination of how actors are syntactically positioned in an active/passive role in combination with the connotation of the action with which they are associated. Subjects, associated with positive actions and whose ethnic background is specified, are most often, but not exclusively, Uyghurs. Conversely, when the active actors whose ethnic background is made explicit are associated with negative actions, they are all Uyghurs. Some of the model citizens in the articles are Uyghurs, but famous Uyghurs like the leader-in-exile, Rebiya Kadeer, are demonized.

The prominent frames are, in ranking order of frequency: national unity equals harmony (9x); poor Xinjiang in need of aid (8x); Rebiya Kadeer as a terrorist villain (responsibility frame) (8x); anti-separatist majority (8x); morality frame in terms of self-sacrifice and model citizens (7x); morality frame in terms of moral duty for gratitude to government (5x);

government as benefactor (4x); Chinese army as enforcer of stability (4x); the more prosperous future (3x); army-loving citizens (3x).

The "united nationalities equals harmony" frame can be illustrated with the following attributions of positive qualifications to the Minzu "living together like brothers," mentioned in a quote by a victim of the July 5 riots: "Of course, the mobsters wounded our flesh, but they did not succeed to wound our hearts. The way we live together is like brothers."[18] The anti-separatist majority frame finds its expression in the following propaganda lines:

> "Strengthen ethnic unity, oppose ethnic separatism, guard the unity of the motherland." Reporters viewed this slogan on a community wall near the neighbourhood community centre. Locals explained it was written by Uyghur residents. It also represents the aspirations of the people of all Minzu of the entire country.[19]

It is precisely in times of unrest that the preaching mode takes over, implying that ethnic unity is not a reality yet. The "government as benefactor" frame and the good news about the government's role in the development of Xinjiang is evident in the following excerpt:

> The enormous successes the economy of Xinjiang has achieved are a result of the battle to unify the Minzu by the people of Xinjiang, but are also the result of the long-term support granted by the central government and the people of the entire country.[20]

The responsibility frame ("Rebiya Kadeer is a terrorist-villain") blames the July 5 riots on Rebiya Kadeer, the Uyghur leader-in-exile and head of the Uyghur World Congress, an organization that is vilified in Chinese official discourse. In the article, headlined "Unveiling the most evil," Kadeer is labelled a "second Dalai Lama who speaks ill of China." The negative predicates cumulatively build the frame of Kadeer as the evil culprit as follows:

> The violent, serious and criminal events in Urumqi were organised and premeditated. The foreign "Uyghur World Congress"—that is headed by Rebiya Kadeer—and other organisations are the dark force behind the violent incidents as they directly incited, planned and executed it.[21]

Not only is the culprit of the unrest sought outside of Xinjiang, any possible ethnic and religious aspect is also explicitly denied. The violence of the riots is described in terms of their criminal staging and organization by hostile forces and separatists, but there is no explicit link between Uyghurs and terrorism, except for diatribes about the World Uyghur Congress, which operates from abroad.

CONCLUSION

Our study was conducted on state narratives of 2008–2009 under the Hu Jintao presidency, before the more recently strengthened Party control over religions in the present Xi Jinping era.[22] The years 2008 and 2009 were chosen, as these were the very years where China and Uyghur ethnic conflicts garnered world attention because of the Olympics and the 2009 Urumqi ethnic riots between Uyghurs and Han Chinese. Research on Chinese press coverage of the Hui Muslim by Alkazemi (2015) revealed a positive portrayal, which is not surprising, given the higher degree of cultural and political integration of the Hui into Chinese society. This begged the question how the prime state newspaper would portray the other Muslim group, the Uyghurs, which is viewed by the authorities as more politically troublesome. Would they stigmatize this Muslim Other in a similar Orientalist way as was suggested in the literature on some Western press coverage of Islam?

Clearly, the global "war on terror" has emboldened Beijing to tighten its grip on a dissenting Xinjiang and thus reduce the region's autonomy. The Uyghur population is regarded by the authorities as a threat to state rule, national unity, and social integration, which can be derived from the implicit message underlying the many propaganda appeals for national unity and harmony in the Chinese-language *Renminribao*. This focus on national unity, supports findings by Bai and Zhen (2014) concerning the propaganda discourse mode in the official press narratives. It emerges through the arguments emphasizing the need for continued aid to minority areas by a benevolent government and for military presence to safeguard stability and strengthen national unity. Also emblematic for the communist propaganda style is the genre in which narratives of heroic deeds and model citizens or soldiers are told. Praise is heaped upon the government and security forces for their love of the people, including the minorities.

The relative salience of themes, gender distribution, as well as the discrepancy in attention between the urban area and the rural periphery echo the results of Zheng's study (2011) about the *RMRB* frontpage coverage of the Uyghurs. Together with Zheng, we conclude that the Uyghur majority living in the rural southwest of Xinjiang is not deemed newsworthy enough for coverage, nor do Uyghur journalists appear to author the narratives of the official press. Of the individuals, male actors are the overwhelmingly dominant category with 79.7% versus 20.3% of female actors.

At the explicit level, the narratives construct a more or less balanced picture of the Uyghurs, with both positive and negative attributes. There is

no mention of Uyghur ethnic nationalism and the majority of the Uyghurs is framed as anti-separatist. The religious dimension is downplayed and in the rare occasions where Islam is discussed, it is portrayed in a positive way as a peace-loving religion, thus being explicitly dissociated from terrorism. This echoes the Chinese official position that denies any link between local discontent and ethnic/religious policies. It also confirms the observations made by Lupano (2015). When drawing the attention to the Uyghur group in the headlines, the religious dimension is virtually absent, which also supports the findings by Bai and Zhen (2014) and Zheng (2011). Strikingly few articles contain a religious dimension. Not surprising for a major state newspaper, politics make up the top theme. Second in rank are narratives on crime, followed by human interest stories. Since most articles relate to the 2009 July 5 ethnic riots, the focus lies on vandalism, organized crime, and the three forces (*sangu shili*), being separatism, religious extremism, and terrorism. However, it is explicitly argued that the cause of terrorism is not religion. This points at a different frame in the Chinese official media narratives from the one constructed in some Western media organizations when dealing with Islamic forces. The combination of positive and negative portrayals of Uyghur Muslims does run parallel to the more nuanced discursive representations of Islam and Muslims in the particular niche of the British Christian news media (Faimau 2013).

The blame for terrorism consistently goes to the foreign Other, like the Uyghur leader-in-exile. This well-considered editorial strategy is not surprising in view of the Chinese authoritarian media system, where media constitute an ideological instrument for the Party to steer public opinion in the "right" way. The careful attribution of blame and responsibility, not so much to the domestic Uyghurs, but to outsiders, is partly mirrored in the finding by Zheng (2011) about the differentiation between the English-language press and the Chinese-language press, both catering to different audiences. In the front-page articles of the English-language daily, Uyghurs are more explicitly framed in the light of terrorism and radicalization, while this portrayal is absent in the Chinese-language paper's headlines. Clearly, the "fighting terrorism frame" is more heavily promoted to a foreign readership, as the terrorist threat and the resulting Chinese jump on the bandwagon of the global war on terror can legitimize its crackdown on Uyghurs. On November 15, 2015, just after the terrorist attacks in Paris, Wang Yi, PRC Foreign Minister, repeated in a speech in Istanbul that "China is also a victim of terrorism and cracking down on ETIM should become an important part of the international fight against terrorism." The dual discourse mode with diverging messages between the vernacular and the foreign language press renders a fuzzy

picture about the Chinese representation practices of the Uyghur Muslims. Additionally, what exacerbates the daunting task of drawing ready conclusions is the seemingly contradictory message between discourse and practice, when it concerns China and religion.

NOTES

1. The study was conducted by a study team of the Media Diversity Institute of Cardiff University, in partnership with ARTICLE 19 and the International Federation of Journalists.

2. Much gratitude goes to my student, Renée Dekker, who coded the Chinese corpus. The author trained the coder in media discourse analysis for this book project on Islam representation in the press and supervised her master thesis on the topic, which provided many of the raw data for the empirical analysis in the third part of this chapter.

3. This theory relates to how media can influence the salience of topics on the public agenda.

4. In seven news articles, a shortened version of the Chinese word for "Uyghur" was used for stylistic diversification (维族 or *weizu*).

5. For general background on Islamic groups in China and the Uyghur-China conflict, see, among others, Bovingdon 2004, 2010; Castets 2006; Christofferson 2007; Dillon 1994, 1996, 2002, 2004, 2013; Doyon 2014; Dubois 2010; Grose 2015; Smith Finley 2007, 2013; Gladney 1996, 2003, 2004a, 2004b; Israeli 1980; Lipman 1997; Ma 2015; Millward 2004; Shorey 2013; Starr 2004, 2015; Van Wie Davis and Azizian 2007; Yang 2012.

6. The pre-PRC Chinese characters for Islam were 回教 (*Huíjiào*), literally "the religion of the Hui." Since the establishment of the PRC, the standard term for "Islam" on mainland China has become the transliteration 伊斯兰教 (*Yīsīlán jiào*, literally "Islam religion") (Gladney 1996, 18–19; 2004a, 161–62). In its 1949 reconstruction of the Hui people as an ethnic group or Minzu, the Communist Party thus separated ethnicity from religion.

7. It must be acknowledged that to this generalized picture there are exceptions, in that some Uyghurs are well integrated into Chinese society and some Hui resist integration into Chinese culture.

8. Since 2014, there has been a step-up of local authority campaigns against Christian places of worship, especially in Zhejiang (destruction of churches, removal of crosses) (see "Christelijk verzet," 2015; original source European Demolition Association, August 26, 2015).

9. The selection of papers for the study by Culpepper did not include the official newspaper *Renminribao*, which is the unit of analysis in the current chapter. The reporting between the Chinese and English websites was found to be consistent.

10. UAA (Uyghur American Association), "Media Advisory: Concern over the Use of the Inaccurate Term Chinese Muslim to Refer to Uyghurs," http://docs.uyghuramerican.org/Media%20advisory-Chinese%20vs%20Uyghur.pdf (in Culpepper 2012, 194).

11. Here is a selection of news occasions: remembering the death of a party cadre, 63-year jubilee of the 6th minorities division PLA, Xinjiang Trade Association visits Pakistan, Olympic Games, finishing of 27th minorities education month, selection of candidates for national benefactors award, 60-year anniversary of PLA presence in Xinjiang, diplomatic envoys visit Xinjiang, Uyghur peasant meeting with Premier Wen Jiabao, acrobatics show for 60th anniversary PRC, publication of statistics report, tour conclusion of the National Propaganda Group (Dekker 2014).

12. RMRB, 不许玷污清真寺 (Do not defile the mosque), July 2009, anonymous author.

13. RMRB, 晨曦中，国旗照常升起 (In the morning the flag is being hoisted as usual), July 28, 2009, Wang Huimin, Dai Gang, Liu Weitao, Ceng Huafeng, Gong Shijian.

14. RMRB, 把所见所闻告诉全世界 (Tell the entire world what you see and hear), August 15, 2009, Li Zhihui, Zhu Xiaolong, and Yu Zhongwen.

15. The non-Han categories consist of foreigners with 4.4% (out of total of 699 actors), Kazakh (1.3%), Hui (1%), Tibetan (0.7%), Non-Han unspecified (0.7%), Mongol (0.6%), Tajik (0.4%), Kirghiz (0.1%), Xibe (0.1%), Mixed Han-Uyghur (0.1%), Naxi (0.1%).

16. By chance, two articles beyond corpus (e.g., September 20, 2010 or June 6, 2010) were found with an ethnic specification of the authors, both of them non-Han Chinese. Further research needs to be conducted to see if it is customary to mention an author's non-Han ethnicity.

17. RMRB, 不许玷污清真寺 (Do not defile the mosque), July 27, 2009, anonymous. The statement that Islam disapproves of the use of violence is uttered by an imam; RMRB, 晨曦中，国旗照常升起 (In the morning the flag is being hoisted as usual), July 28, 2009, Wang et al. In this article, the authors recount how, during the riot, fifteen people were saved from the violence in the streets because they were allowed into the mosque. It is reiterated that Islam is a peaceful religion. None of the mosque's employees were reportedly involved in the violence.

18. RMRB, 病房里的民族情 (Minzu feelings of a hospital ward), June 8, 2009, Shi Shaodong and Wang Yunfeng.

19. RMRB, 摧不垮的钢铁长城 (Indestructible Chinese wall), July 21, 2009, anonymous.

20. RMRB, 新疆的发展与进步 (Xinjiang's development and progress), September 22, 2009, anonymous.

21. RMRB, 画皮下的罪恶 (Unveiling the most evil), July 8, 2009, anonymous.

22. Given the policy measures and state actions against Muslim and Christian actors under President Xi Jinping, a follow-up study on the latest articles in the Chinese state press about Islam and Islamic and other religious actors in China would be illuminating to see whether there is a growing discrepancy between discourse and reality. For example, according to an article in the Chinese state-run newspaper, *The Global Times*, published on February 9, 2015, government policy toward the underground Christian church is reported to have been relaxed, but recent actions against church demolitions point to the contrary (see *Verbiest Koerier*, October 2015, 12–13).